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Nicholas Breton the Poet,
"Facile, ready, ever fertile."

by
Eva March Tappan.
1896.

The only edition of Bretons works that is in any degree complete is that edited by Grosart, Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton, Chertsey Worthies' Library, 1879.

For a full bibliography, see that compiled by W. Hall Griffin in Morley's English Writers, volume XI.

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I Life.

The chief source of information concerning Nicholas Breton's early life is the will of his father, written in 1557-8, probated in 1558-9. This will,[1] a lengthy document, provides liberally for the wife and the five children, devises generous legacies to a number of household servants, remembers various hospitals, the "poorest creatures" in several parishes, "poorest Skolers" of the university of Cambridge,[2] and even sets aside a sum of money for "repayinge the highe wayes, bridges and other moste needfull and necessary thinges."[3] There are mentions of "jewelles" and plate and valuable furniture and clothes, and the whole tone of the will

[1] Printed in full in Grosart's Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton, Chertsey Worthies' Library, Memorial Introduction, p. xii-xvii. [2] Ibid. p. xiii. [3] Ibid. p. xiii

indicates that its maker was a man who had wealth and was accustomed to use it freely and generously. That he was as liberal in thought as in money matters, that he had due regard to the preferences of others, may be fairly inferred from a bequest to one Henry Knighte, "so that he continue to study at the Louvre, or use any other honest exercyse of Lernige."[1] That the wife was a woman of good sense and discernment is clear from the responsibilities thrown upon her in the management of the estate, and from the fact that it was to remain in her hands (provided she did not "happen to marry or dy"), until the sons were twenty-two and twenty-four respectively. If the daughters married without her consent

[1] Froissart's Breton, Introd., p. XXI

their legacies were to be forfeited."[1]

From all this we may infer that Nicholas Bretayn entered life endowed at least with a goodly heritage of practical ability and commonsense, and that he was brought up "in learning and vertue,"[2] in a home of comfort or even of affluence. From the provisions for the older brother Richard's "maynteynance lyvyng and bringing vpp", and from the fact that in 1557-8 he was to have "my gylte Skayne my Corselett and my Jorney cote"[3] of the father's will,

[1] "And that then my foresaid legacies and bequests above made to such of my said daughters as shall so marry w^t out consent of my said wife shalbe vtterlye voyde and of none effecte." Enrolments Bretayn, Introd., p. xv.

[2] Ibid. p. xvii.

[3] Ibid. p. xvi.

Grosart argues[1] that he was not more than fifteen, and that, as Nicholas was to come of age at twenty-four and the elder brother at twenty-two, there was perhaps a difference of two years in their respective ages. That would assign the birth of Richard to 1542-3, and that of Nicholas to 1544-5.[2]

Some time previous to 1568, the widow married the poet Gascoigne. Legal action was of course taken in regard to the interest of the Breton children in their father's property, but I find no ground on which to base any theory of the necessity for a "restoration of good feeling", as Grosart puts it,[3] between Gascoigne and any of the family; while there is reason for arguing an

[1] Grosart's Breton, Introd., p. XII.

[2] Not 1542-3, as Grosart puts it. (Grosart's Breton, Introd., p. XII) by either mistake or misprint.

[3] Ibid. p. XI.

especially pleasant companionship between the two poets.[1]

Nicholas Breton took no university degree, and the probability of his ever having been a student at Oxford rest on the following somewhat slender evidence:—

1. He dedicated his Pilgrimage to Paradise to "the Gentlemen Students and Scholars at Oxford."

2. The introduction to one of his poems[2] refers to the author as "a young Gentleman, who..... had spent some years at Oxford."

3. The diary of Reverend Richard Madox[3] records a meeting in 1582, apparently at Antwerp, with "Mr. Brytten, once of Oriel College, wch made verses well." That the register of Oriel College shows no trace of his name is, unfortunately, a fact of no value from any point of view. His references to college life, though not

[1] Works of Nicholas Breton, p. 50/1. [2] See page 69.
[3] Sloane MS. 5008, British Museum.

especially frequent, are easy and natural.[1] Ernaut says[2] that his writings "have a notable absence of classical quotation and allusion". To this I can only say that Breton is in no respect an extremist, and that, though he rarely introduces a set quotation from the classics, yet in his mythological allusions, and especially in his occasional use of Latin words, he manifests an everyday familiarity far removed from the almost superstitious reverence of the ignorant man for a dead language.

The only evidence that we have of his possible marriage is the entry in the register of St. Giles.

[1] Grimella's Fortunes, p. 61; An Old Man's Lesson, p. 12/1, 13/1; Strange News out of Divers Countries, p. 11/1; Fantasies, p. 15/1; A Post with a Packet of Mad Letters, Second Series, Letter 16. [2] Ernaut's Breton, Introd., p. IX.

Cripplegate, London (his family parish) of a marriage between one Nicholas Brytten and Ann Sutton. This is given by Froissart,[1] as one also other entries referring to the birth of four children to Nicholas Brytten (Brittaine and Britten). From Blundeley Nicholas's mss. notes to Froissart's Bretan,[2] it seems possible that in the marginal copy of Old Chaucer's New Collinaunder in the inaccessible library at Britwell there may be evidence of value on this question. Bretan's writings were published between 1577 and 1626. No record of his death has been found, but it may be supposed to have taken place soon after the latter date.

[1] Froissart's Bretan, Introd., p. xxi.

[2] In the library of the University of Pennsylvania.

II. Outline of Literary Activity.

Bretons life extended over an
eventful period. Two religious revolutions,
the burning of bishops and archbishops,
the execution of Lady Jane Grey and
of Mary Queen of Scots, discoveries of
marvellous countries, voyages that
read like the Arabian Nights, the
miracle of the annihilation of the
Spanish Armada — and in the very
midst of it all sat Nicholas Breton,
quietly writing religious poetry! To the
literary movements of his day he
was most susceptible, though his
response was rarely instantaneous,
but bare public events produced
apparently no effect upon his mind.
His first work after the defeat of
the Armada (1588) was a pastoral (1591)
Elizabeth died (1603) and he wrote a
Packet of Good Letters (1603); all
England was shaken by the

gunpowder plot (1605), and he wrote The Soul's Immortal Crown (1605).

Of his score of poetical booklets nearly half are religious; one is chiefly vers de société; but one of his pastorals is of any length, and his writing of satire hardly went beyond a single year. Strictly speaking, then, Breton was a religious poet who made literary departures into vers de société, pastoral, and satire. His vers de société was but the tuning of his "prentice hand," and has little significance in his poetical career as a whole. His pastoral was the natural result of the decade during which the pastoral influence was supreme, and his satire followed almost inevitably upon that of Hanstan and Hall. The study of his literary life, looked at through a perspective of three hundred years, falls

naturally, and in some respects chronologically, under the headings: —

I. Previous criticisms.
II. Religion/poetry.
III. Vers de Société.
IV. Pastoral.
V. Satire.
VI. The man as shown in his work.

III. Chronological Criticism of his Work.

Twelve years after the publication of Bretons first work, I find the earliest reference to him that is in any degree critical in Puttenham's Arte of English Poesie (1589), which says, "And in her Majestys time that now is are sprung vp another crew of courtly makers, noblemen and gentlemen of her Majestys owne seruants, who haue written excellently well." Among them "Britton" is named.

Two years later another pamphlet appeared describing "The Honourable Entertainment gieuen to the Queene a Progresse at Elsthan in Hartfordshire by the R. H. the Earle of Hertford."[1] Here under "The thirde daies entertainment," is the note, "On Wednesday morning

[1] Nichols's Progresses of Queen Elizabeth.

about 9 o'clock as her Majestie opened a casement of her gallerie window, ther were three excellent musitains, who being disguised in auncient country attire did greete her with a pleasant song of Corydon and Phillida, made in three parts of purpose. The song, as well for the worth of the ditte, as the aptnesse of the note thereto applied, it pleased her Highnesse after it had been once sung to command it againe, and highly to grace it with her cheerfull acceptance and commendation."

In 1598 Francis Meres in Palladis Tamia names Bretan among those who are "most passionate among us to bewail and bemoan the perplexities of love."

John Bodenham in Belvedere (1600), mentions Bretan as among those whose "fresh lines essays of their poetry."

Prefaced to Melancholike Humours (1605), are the following lines by Ben Jonson: —

"Now that would dst finde the habit of true passion
And see a minde attir'd in perfect straines;
Not wearing moodes, as gallants doe a fashion,
In these fride times, only to shewe their braines.

Looke here on Bretons Worke, the master print;
Where, such perfections to the life doe rise:
If they seem wry, to such as looke asquint,
The fault's not in the object but their eyes.

For, as one cunning with a lateral view
Unto a cunning piece wrought perspective,
Wants faculty to make a censure true:
So with this authors readers will it thrive:

Which, being eyed directly, I divine
His proofe their praise, will meet, as in this line."

John Hynd's Ehiasta Lidiriosa (1606), inserts a poem as "a fancy which that learned author Nicholas Breton

hath dignified with respect."

In Dekker's Gul's Horn Book (1609) is the sentence, "Jam Pasquil's Mad-Caps that will doot."

After 1609, allusions to Bretan are not infrequent in the dramatic literature of the time, especially in Beaumont and Fletcher's plays; e.g.:

(1) "Do you read Madcaps still?"

Thy Corsaire, II. 4 (1610).

(2) "Did I for this
Consume my quarters in meditations, vows,
And woo'd her in Heroical Epistles?
Did I expound the Owl,
And undertook with labor and expense
The re-collection of those thousand pieces,
Consum'd in cellars and tobacco-shops,
Of that arch-learn'd Englishman, Rich. Breton?"

The Scornful Lady, II. 1 (Between 1609 and 1616)

(3) "And your Pasquil
Went not below the Mad-Caps of that time."

The Nice Valour, V. 2 (1613).

(4)

"Who look'd on you,
But fishing Kites that knew you would be prizes,
And Prentices in Paul's Churchyard that scented
Your want of Bretan's books?"

Wit without money, III. 4 (1614).

Ben Jonson in his Execration upon Vulcan (printed 1640, written probably between 1621 and 1625) writes: —

"Had I foreknown of this, my least desire
To have held triumph on a feast of fire,
. . . . . many a ream
To redeem mine I had sent in.
With Nicholas' Pasquils
Fuddle with your match,
And the strange lines that do the turnes
So catch."

Sir John Suckling, whose critical acumen deserves respect, joins Bretan's name with Shakespeare's in The Goblins, II. 1 (1638): —

"The last a well-wit-piece. I assure you,

a Bretan Stabe'l; and Shakespeare's very way."

Bretan is mentioned in Richard Brome's Jovial Crew, II. 1 (acted 1641):—

"And then fall into courtship, one in a set speech taken out of old Britain's Works, another in verses out of the Academy of Compliments, or some other of the new Poetical Pamphletiers, and hitherto only to avail paper and publish their name in print." The epithet "old" was almost a term of endearment in an age in which life moved so fast that the work of yesterday was old, and the remembrance of [illegible] until to-day was fame.

In Edward Phillips's Theatrum Poetarum (1675) is written:—"Nicholas Bretan, a writer of pastorals, sonnets, canzons and madrigals in which kind of writing he keeps company with several other contemporary imitators of Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney, in a publish collection

of selected odes of the chief pastoral sonnetteers &c of that age.

These are the principal references to Breton that I have found in the century following the appearance of his first work, if we except Nash's lingering allusion to the author of the Bowers of Delights in his preface to Astrophel and Stella, 1591, as "Pan sitting in his bower of delights and a number of Midases to admire his miserable horn-pipes." What do these criticisms sum up? He is said by Puttenham to have written "excellently well"; one of his poems has attracted the favorable attention of the queen; by Meres he is named as one of the best lyric and erotic poets; Badenham and Webster mention him; Nyrd calls him "that learned author"; several dramatists refer to him in their plays; Ben Jonson writes some flattering

'A work by no means certainly Breton's.

verses, which do not, however, ring quite so true as do his lines on Shakespeare, and one of less value than his chance mention of Tasso; Meeking compares him to Shakespeare; Phillips calls him one of the emulators of Spenser and Sidney. Regarded as literary criticism, all this is of small value in determining Breton's place among his contemporaries; but regarded as the unofficial expression of an age that enjoyed what it liked, forgot what it did not like, and did little analysis in either case, the good-natured familiarity and the very briefness of these mentions, especially in the dramas, say much for his popularity and appreciation among a people whose literary instinct was for the best. Saintsbury says[1] that Breton "pamphleted with such copiousness and persistence for nearly half a century, that it is

[1] Elizabethan and Jacobean Pamphlets, Introd., p. xvii

clear there must have been money to be made by the practice."[1] But when in the same paragraph he speaks of the "mild mediocrity" of Breton, he forgets that "mild mediocrity" is not the stuff that popularity was made of in the Elizabethan days.

For the next hundred years Breton seems to have been completely forgotten, if we except the one ballad printed in The Muses' Library by Mrs. Elizabeth Cooper in 1737. This same ballad, Phillida and Corydon, together with the Shepherd's Address to his Muse, appeared in Percy's Reliques in 1765, and from that time Breton has seldom been left out of poetical collections or entirely forgotten by poetical critics.

Wartons History of English Poetry[2] (1774) mentions him as one of the

[1] Breton, however, did not really need to write for bread. [2] Section 6.

most prolific penman of his time"; speaks of his "madcap" as having considerable merit, and deems the literary controversy between Breton, Haustan, and Weever (?) worthy of a full account.

Sir S. Egerton Brydges reprinted several of Breton's works at his famous Lee Priory Press,[1] and from 1808 on let no opportunity pass to express his admiration for this author. In his edition of Thestrum Poetarum (1815)[2] he says: "The ballad of Phillida and Corydon is a delicious little poem; and if we are to judge from this specimen, his poetical powers (for surely he had the powers of a poet) were distinguished by a simplicity at once easy and elegant." In the Censura Literaria[3] (1805-1809) he speaks of "that prolific writer Nicholas Breton, who supplied the press with a rich diversity of ingenious compositions for more than forty years." In his edition of

[1] See Lowndes's Bibliographer's Manual.
[2] Page 321. [3] Vol. II. p. 183. Second edition, 1815.

England's Helicon (1810-1814), he says:[1] — "By far the best of these (poems) are the compositions of Dr. Thomas Lodge and Nicholas Breton. That the genius of both these writers was not only elegant and highly polished, but pure and unsophisticated.... may be safely affirmed .... As to Breton,[2] if he possessed less sentiment than Lodge, perhaps his fancy was still more delicate and playful, and his expression more simple and harmonious." In his Restituta[3] (1814-1816), he praises "the ingenuity, fertility, fluency, metrical ease and moral force of Breton's commendable pen; and again he says[4] that Breton's "copiousness of natural sentiment and ease and elegance of language are so eminent and so well adapted to popularity that the oblivion which has covered him is a matter of

[1] British Bibliographer, vol. III, Introd. to England's Helicon, p. II, third edition. [2] Ibid. p. III.
[3] Vol. III, p. 174, second edition, 1815. [4] Ibid. p. 16.

constant surprise to me."

Drake says[1] (1817), "The chief contributors (to Englands Helicon) were among the best lyric poets of their age. Amid this galaxy of bards we cannot fail to distinguish for their decided superiority the productions of Breton, Greene, Lodge, Marlowe, Raleigh, which might confer celebrity on any selection." Drake places Breton as one of the "leaders of a great portion of their art during a period of half a century." Although he names him as a lyric poet, he does not mention him in particular as a satirist or as a writer of pastorals.

Thomas Campbell's Essay on English Poetry (1819) says of Breton:- "His happiest vein is in little pastoral pieces.... The lyrical poetry of Elizabeth's age runs often into pastoral insipidity and fantastic carelessness, though there may be found in some of the

[1] Shakespeare and His Times, vol. I, p. 721 etc.

pieces of Sir Philip Sidney, Lodge, Marlowe, and Breton, not only a sweet, wild spirit, but an exquisite finish of expression."

Alexander Dyce (1831) makes casual mention of Breton as "a man of no ordinary genius, writing in his more inspired moments with tenderness and delicacy."

Taking a general view of the references to Breton during the seventy years that followed Percy's reprinting of Phillida and Corydon with the accompanying account of its place in the Elizabethan festivities, we see that he is neither forgotten nor does he receive the honor of critical study. He is spoken of less familiarly and more respectfully but still in the way of casual mention. Percy, Warton, Brydges, Drake, Campbell, Dyce, speak of

Introduction to the Works of Robert Greene.

him, sometimes with almost Elizabethan affectation, but rarely with even a touch of modern criticism.

The first criticism in any degree comprehensive which he seems to have received is that of Thomas Corser (1860): — "Nicholas Breton, a writer of elegant and refined taste.... While some of his poetical pieces display the deepest and most fervent feelings of the devout and pious mind, breathing forth its aspirations to the Almighty, one while in strains of warm and rapturous praise, and another in most profound and humble penitence of soul: and while some of his productions are filled with the richest humour, blended with the purest fancy and clothed in chaste and delicate language, there are others evincing a coarse

[1] Collectanea Anglo-Poetica, vol. II, part I.

and vulgar style and tone of expression almost leading the reader to doubt whether such varied writings could all be the productions of the same pen. (This change of a "coarse and vulgar style" is due to a mistaken ascription to Breton of Pasquil's Nightcap, now known to be the work of one "William F.")[1] .... Breton's serious prose is warm and impassioned, terse and pleasing, and his poetical works are written in a graceful and refined spirit; and in simple, artless language, which makes it 'move irresistibly to the heart.' Many of his smaller lyrical pieces are full of tenderness and beauty and are remarkable for their genuine poetry and exquisite taste and simplicity." This bears the marks of that real study of Breton's works as a whole which I have failed to

[1] Stationers Register for 6 April 1613.

recognize in previous criticisms.

It is only within the last decade that Breton seems on the way to win back again some small share of the popularity that was his three hundred years ago; only then appreciation was instinctive and made its way from the people to the critics, while now it is through the appreciation of the critics that it must make its way to the people. Not that all these later criticisms are just. Often do they bear the marking of a most limited and superficial reading of the author. Generalizations that would aptly fit some one division of his poems are frequently grossly unfair when applied to all the works of so versatile a writer.

Grosart (1879)[1] praises him for his rich, pure English, his originality

[1] Grosarts Breton, Memorial Introd., p.xxxiii

in an imitative period, his melody, brightness, sweetness, purity, — indeed, for most of the good qualities that a poet of his class could possess — and claims for him an especially high rank as a religious poet.

Saintsbury (1887)[1] treats Breton "the industrious man of all work", as he calls him, with a supercilious manner that arouses instinctive rebellion against the occasional justice of his strictures. He says:[2] — "His best certain thing is the pretty Philida and Coridon idyll..... but I own that I can never read this latter without thinking of two lines of Fulke Greville's in the same metre and on not very different theme —

'Oer enamelled meads they went,
Quiet she, he passion-rent.'

which are simply worth all the works

[1] Elizabethan Literature, ch. III, p. 120 (1891). [2] Ibid. ch. XI p. 239.

of Bretaïs prose and verse, unless we count the Lenllaby, put-
together..... His work.... is ..... very interesting to the literary student, because it shows better perhaps than anything else the style of literature which a man disdaining to condescend to burlesque or bawdry, not gifted with any extraordinary talent..... but possessed of a certain literary faculty, could then produce with a fair chance of being published and bought. It cannot be said that the result shows great daintiness in Bretaïs public. The verse with an improvement in smoothness and fluency, is very much in the doggerel style which was prevalent before Spenser; and the prose, though showing considerable faculty, if not of invention, yet of a deft imitation of previously invented styles.

is devoid of distinction and point
..... The pervading characteristics
are Bretan's invariable modesty,
his pains and, if I may be
permitted to use the word,
gentlemanly spirit, and a
fashion of writing which, if
not very pointed, picturesque
or epigrammatic, is clear, easy,
and on the whole rather
superior in observance of the
laws of grammar and arrangement
to the works of many of much
greater note in his day." Later,
he even refuses to admit in any
wise Bretan's title to the name
of poet.

Buller reads him with far more
sympathy, and admits, perhaps a
little shamefacedly, that he found
interesting "even Bretan's one novel,
The Miseries of Invincible, with its

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[1] Elizabethan and Jacobean Pamphlets, Introd. p. xxxii. 1892

unfortunate ending. Bullen says:—
"Breton wrote always in great haste, and never indulged in the luxury of revision. He frequently allows his rhymes to carry him along and lets the sense shift for itself. We may not be quite sure at times in reading the Passionate Shepherd that the grammatical constructions are nicely adjusted, and fastidious critics may complain that the writing is too diffuse, but the poet is in his gayest humour; we are charmed by the easy flow of his verse, and should be churls if we were not warmed by his enthusiasm..... Though I have some leaning for Breton's devotional poems, I can hardly allow that they are of the first quality... Both Davies and Breton could strain off any quantity of devotional verse

Sonnets from Elizabethan Romances, Introd., p. xx 1896

(respectable verse, too.) when the feeling reigned there, but their fluency was very tiresome. . . . As a satirist Breton had little of the Lucian indignatio, real or assumed, of Marston or Hall. . . . There was nothing ill-natured or acrimonious about Breton. . . . It is only in his moral and didactic writings that Breton is even tedious. His prose, which is always quaint and neatly turned, is valuable for the bright, cheerful pictures that it gives of Elizabethan society, and his lyrical poetry at its best is very good indeed."

Gosse's estimate of Breton is that he was an "Elizabethan primitive who went on publishing fresh volumes until after the death of James I, but without having modified the Sixteenth century

Jacobean Poets, ch. I, p. 16 & c (1894).

character of his style. . . . Breton had the root of poetry in him, but he was no scholar[1], inartistic and absolutely devoid of the gift of self-criticism".

There is sensitive appreciation of Breton, in a note to Elizabethan Lyrics[2], unfortunately much too brief, which speaks of him as "writing incessantly and unequally verse, whose, it mattered little what; frequently in debt and trouble, facile, ready, even fertile. . . . There is a naturalness, an easy flow, and gaiety, a tenderness and purity about Breton that ought to rescue him to fame."

These collected criticisms will show that there is plenty of room for a thoughtful, scholarly, conscientious, and comprehensive

[1] Alas for poor John Kynd of 1606. See page 20.
[2] Page 226; by Felix E. Schelling (1895).

estimate of Breton that shall avoid flippancy, blind enthusiasm, and sweeping generalization.

The death of Henry Morley has lost us the criticism of Breton that he had promised for the eleventh volume of his English Writers. W. Hall Griffin, who completed the work, hardly mentions Breton as "one of the most forcible writers of the day," and says that his verse "often has the ring of a true poet."

The appendix to English Writers, vol. XI, gives a valuable bibliography of Breton.

II. Religious Poetry.

The highest religious poetry, though universal in its application, must embody a real, or seemingly real, individual experience, and must (2) manifest no consciousness of the audience. Many of our modern hymns show to the initiated marks of having been written not from individual experience, but with a conscious purpose, either to accord with the ideas of some one sect or to intensify some one partisan doctrine. The sense of religious solidarity is, in that these hymns are only too plainly addressed to an audience that is either limited or monotypal-theistic. They have become, to use Mills' distinction, eloquence rather than poetry.

Poetry and its Varieties by J. S. Mill.

The feeling of individuality was intensified in the sixteenth century by "the fresh vigor given by the doctrines of the Reformation to the sense of personal responsibility and immediate relation to God." The feeling of unconsciousness suffered to some extent from the tendency to didacticism aroused by these religious revolutions within twenty-five years, and by the knowledge that a man might be called on to seal his words with his blood. To the end of the century and far into the next, the mood of the bravest was somewhat cautiously meditative, only in rarest instances was it spontaneous and cheerful.

In some of Breton's religious poems, the individuality, the personal tone, is so strong as to

George MacDonald's England's Antiphon, chapter I.

convince Erasmus of their autobiographical character. On the other hand, his allusions to current events are few and indirect; of his family he makes no mention whatever; there is no proof that he either grieved or suffered more than the average man, as one might infer from the tone of the hymns, and in the lack of external evidence, I see no ground for the belief that he has shown as much of self-revelation as of poetic insight. Of the spirit of controversy he has less than many of the hymnists of his day. He takes a conventional view of most matters, and he can hardly be said to take any view of questions of theological controversy. His creed consists of three articles; that wrong is punished, right is rewarded, and repentance means forgiveness. He writes frankly and naturally, neither with foolish

repression of his belief, nor with expectation of encountering opposition, nor with the elation of a man who finds himself on the winning side.

The possibility that he was a Roman Catholic is hardly worth mentioning, for the idea seems to have been suggested merely by a careless ascription to him of Mary Magdalene's Love, a poem utterly unlike his work. Both Froissart and Brinsley Nicholson[2] have collected a number of proofs from Bretaigne's own words of his approximate familiarity with the ritual of the English Church. A still stronger proof of his protestantism is the unRomish familiarity which he, as well as Gascoigne, shows with the English Bible, not only with its narrative portions and by way

[1] Froissart's Bretaigne, Introd., p. xxiii.
[2] Notes and Queries, 5th series, vol. I, pp. 501-2.

of direct quotation, but that closer familiarity which manifests itself in easy allusion and in unconscious adoption of phraseology; e.g.,

"Height, depth, length, breadth are in thy love declared."[1]

"Some in their chariots, some in horses trust."[2]

"Helps to build up the walls of Jerusalem."[3]

Grosart does Breton another but of justice in printing in parallel columns passages from the Countess of Pembroke's Passion and from Watson's Tears of Fancy.[4]

[1] Countess of Pembroke's Love, 23/1, l. 37; cf. Ephesians III. 18:—"To comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" &c

[2] Ibid. 27/2, l. 51; cf. Psalms XX. 7:—"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses."

[3] Dedication of Pilgrimage to Paradise; cf. Psalms CII. 18:—"Build thou the walls of Jerusalem." [4] Grosart's Breton, Introd., p. LXXI.

This comparison seems to me to prove not only Sidney's charge, that Watson was the borrower, but also that he was unnecessarily superficial in his appropriations; e.g., Bretan writes:—

"The hunted hart sometimes doth leave the hound,
My heart, alas, is never out of chase."

This becomes under Watson's treatment a mere alliterative memory. He writes:[2]—

"The hunted hare sometimes doth leave the hound,
My heart, alas, is never out of chase."

He quite overlooks the play on "hart" and "heart"; in short, he borrows a form without sense and then loses it! In Tears of Fancy[3] Watson uses Bretan's peculiar expression, "woe

[1] Countess of Pembroke's Passion, Stanza 13.
[2] Tears of Fancy, Sonnet 57.
[3] Sonnet 38.

begane me," which I have found in no other author.[1] With such obligations to Bretan, Watson's lines:[2]

"If poets have done well in times long past
To glose on trifling toys of little price,"

became doubly ingracious, if they refer to Bretan's Toys of an Idle Head.[3]

Bretan's earliest religious poem, The Pilgrimage to Paradise,[4] is an attempt at allegory, and as a whole hardly a successful attempt. It shows signs of the influence of the Fairy Queen,[5] but has even less of reality. Spenser's "gentle knight has at least a dinted shield, but Bretan's pilgrim discomfits the seven heads of Satan by seven elaborate discourses, carefully adjusted, one to

[1] With one exception, the song beginning, "Sweet Love, if thou wilt gain a monarch's glory," which ends, "Alas! poor love, then thou art woe-begone thee," in John Wilbye's Madrigals (1598).

[2] Ekatompathia, Poem 17; published 1582.

[3] 1577. [4] 1592. [5] 1590.

each. The earlier part of the poem is more impersonal than a morality. The characters, if they may be so called, are mere puppets of the most transparently artificial construction, and it is often difficult to determine which one is speaking. In the latter part, however, none can fail to see sweetness and strength. In his sympathetic description of the

"Fisherman all in his boat alone,
With every billow tossed from side to side,"

there is pictorial talent, and his telling of the whole little story makes one regret that his writing of narrative was so nearly limited to his prose. In his religious writings sometimes, there is less of allegory, and much less of that indefinable air of writing for an audience. Sometimes the inspiration fails; occasionally he is a little labored; his metaphor, rich and fervid as it is,

/ 15/2, l. 32.

seldom rises to the highly impassioned; yet, through it all is the irresistible charm of sweetness, tenderness, inexhaustible freshness, musical rhythm and easy flow of language; and even though his religious poems are, as a whole, hardly more cheerful or animated than those of his contemporaries, yet, with his ealmest sincerity and his unwavering faith, they can hardly be dreary reading. He is never bitter, never misanthropic. His hopeful, sunny nature gleams through the slight melancholy that was regarded as the proper atmosphere to surround a religious poem. He often cries out of the depths, but he never loses a cheerful confidence in the result of his supplication. Southwell's Calvinistic pessimism would have been as incomprehensible to him as the ecstasies of Southwell. At the thought of death Southwell gazes with rapturous longing into the

heaven that opens before him; Jacques, with his overflowing vitality, flinches and fears; Breton leisurely sentimentalizes. Breton knows nothing of the rhapsodies of the mystic, nothing of the spiritual conflicts of Saint Augustine, nothing of the higher selfishness of Thomas à Kempis; but he is a simple, true-hearted, Christian man, who means to do his best, and is sincerely sorry when he fails.

The verbal style of his religious writings presents little that is especially characteristic, or different from that of other writers of his time. He shows the delight in words that was common to all Elizabethans, the consciousness that they were real things and not abstractions, that they had a substantial existence of their own. With this in mind, I can never feel that their plays on words, their puns

repetitions, turns, and twists, are in any way a blemish. They are rather a proof of the Elizabethan appreciation of a form of life so intangible and subtle, that we, unhappily, have lost their delicate sensitiveness to its existence. Every Southwell, with all his intensity of spirit and in full view of the masterpieces for which he yearned, did not count it idle play when he wrote:—

"Who lives in love, loves least to live,
And long delays doth grieve,
If thus he love by whom he lives,
To whom all love is due."

Breton is always fond of this leg-play, but diffuse as he is, he rarely lets the sound supersede the sense; the word may play, but it must do his work, must add to his thought; e.g.,

Life's Death, Love's Life.

"Before there was a light, there was a light
Which saw the world the world could never see."[1]

She revels in a kind of backward-glancing climax; e.g.:

"How lead'st the eye unto his heart's delight,
How lead'st the heart unto his soul's desire,
How lead'st the soul unto the living light,
Which shows the heavens where hope can go no higher."[2]

This is especially common in some of his prose works, and it appears on a broader scale in The Soul's Immortal Crown, in which the description of each

[1] The Ravished Soul, fo. 6/1.
[2] Countess of Pembroke's Love, fo. 22/1, l. 7-10. 6 ff.

"The oftener seen, the more I lust,
The more I lust, the more I smart,
The more I smart, the more I trust,
The more I trust, the heavier heart,
The heavy heart loves no mine unrest,
My absence, therefore, like I best."

Cantio Augent Dolorem, by Barnabe Googe

virtue leads up to that of the next.

The simplicity of the means that he employs is worthy of notice. His words are in large proportion monosyllables, and they are seldom to be taken in any unusual sense; neither are there often unexpected turns of thought. His rhymes are the familiar ones of the average hymnbook, "pain — again," "King — bring," "love — love," "choose — refuse," etc., and he is inexcusably careless in his repetition of rhymes; e.g., in the first fifty rhymes of the Countess of Pembroke's Passion, four are repeated, and the same thing is true of the first fifty rhymes of the Countess of Pembroke's Love. In the first sixty-three rhymes of the Ravished Soul, the pair, "glory — glory," appears five times. Tracing his religious poems from beginning to end, this simplicity of means is unchanged, but there is developed

a resonance of rhythm, an overtone of thought, that have come with the experience of the increasing years in literature and in life. The smooth, peaceful flow of the sentiment is not altered, but the stream has broadened and deepened. There is reserved force. The quiet, meditative mood hides to outbursts of song. The gentle melody has become abundant harmony. It speaks well for Bryant's spiritual and poetic nature that he is at his best in tones of praise. His hymn, "When the angels all are singing," seems to me the most perfect of all his religious writings. There is here earnestness, aspiration, clearness of vision, the faith that is the substance of things hoped for, and withal, exquisiteness of rhythm, condensation and completeness of

/ The Longing of a Blessed Heart, p. 15.

thought, and a certain freshness and brightness, an eagerness of childlike longing, that would make a De Profundis into a paean of joy. It is the Pursuum Corda of his religious poetry.

V. Vers de Société.

Those of Bretón's poems that are of the nature of vers de société will hardly add to his fame. As a whole, they are lacking in airiness, elegance, crispness, and lightness of touch, far more common in his other writings. There is sometimes a graceful turn of thought, but in general the movement is too ponderous, and the wit is too thinly spread. Wyatt's vers de société is concise and pithy, and never didactic. Gascoigne had in his lightest vein a sense of construction which Bretón never often has. Gascoigne stops because the thought is expressed. Bretón, like Surrey, writes on till the time is up, and with a very apparent expectation of praise that is sometimes a little exasperating; so is also his vein of self-satisfied deliberation

when contrasted with Lindsay's
feverish exercises.

In the Days of an Idle Head[1] I find little to commend. There are gems of religious sentiment and of sympathetic feeling, but shown in irresponsible fashion, and often with complete loss of Bretan's usual power of critical selection; e.g. after describing in some eight hundred lines the various objects seen in a dream,[2] he finds no objection to enumerating them a second time, querying after each one what it may mean — a favorite anti-climax of his in setting forth his numerous dreams.[3] The wonder is that a man who wrote so poorly at thirty-five should have written so well before he was fifty.

1 1577. 2 39/2 A Strange Dream -
3 Cf. Charles Lamb's Vision of Repentance with its similar — and yet very different — treatment.

In regard to the Arbor of Amorous Devices, I find no reason for disagreeing with the statement made by W. Hall Griffin,[1] that "Britain's Diuinitie"[2] alone is undoubtedly by Breton," though several other poems show his favourite expressions and turns of thought. The gem of the book, and the gem of all the books ascribed to Breton, "A Sweet Lullabie",[3] is somewhat magisterially claimed for Breton by Grosart,[4] though he makes no attempt to prove his claim. I positively believe that this claim "is based on little external and refuted by all internal evidence". I do not find in the poem one trace of the qualities of Breton's thought, or of the manual mannerisms of his style. I claim it for Gascoigne on the following grounds:—

[1] Manley's English Writers, vol. XI, Bibliography of Breton. [2] p. 9. [3] p. 71. [4] Grosart to Breton, Introd. p. XLVIII. [5] Elizabethan Literature, ch. II, p. 239.

1. Similarity of phrase with lines in Gascoigne's Epitaph upon Captain Bourchier.[1]

a. "A noble mouth of blood and bone;
His glancing looks, if he once smile,
Right honest women may beguile."
Lullabie.

a. "He might for birth have boasted noble race,
Yet were his manners meek and always mild.
His gate a guess by gazing on his face,
And judged thereby might quickly be beguiled."
Epitaph.

b. "Although a lion in the field,
A lamb in town thou shalt him find."
Lullabie.

b. "In field a lion and in town a child."
Epitaph.

2. The clear-eyed, unconventional view of right, a characteristic of Gascoigne, but directly opposed to the unchanging conventionality of Breton.

[1] Hazlitt's Gascoigne, vol. 1, p. 75.

3. The impression given by the poem that it is the product of a moment of inspiration, and not of any poetical industry. These moments of inspiration were as characteristic of the work of Saccaigne, as is the impression of industry given by the works of Bretal.

II. Pastorals.

The pastoral idea was in England seed sown in fertile ground. Pastoral was in most perfect accord with three of the leading tendencies of the age of Elizabeth; (1) the inherent English love of nature and simplicity, (2) the healthy liking for the marvellous, fostered by the great events of the age, and (3) the keen interest in human nature that was to find its highest development in the drama. One or another of these elements predominated in the work of each pastoralist. With Sidney it was the romantic combined with love of nature; with Lodge it was love of the simple combined with an appreciation of the marvellous that would lead naturally to the allegorical; with Breton it was love of nature combined with close study of human nature.

How far and in what way Breton was influenced by the current literature of his time is a question in which one must move with unusual caution. Parasitical as he was, he had nothing of Defoe's instinctive clutch upon the sensation of the next moment. Strictly speaking, he was not an originator; but he had a way of watching a literary fashion until its first tendency was past, and then in his adoption of it, adding to the charm of familiarity some special touch of his own; e.g. "The decade, 1580-1590, may be regarded as the period of the supremacy of the pastoral," but the first certain date of Breton's pastoral is 1591, when his pretty Phillida and Corydon was written for the "Honorable Entertainment given to the Queen's Majesty at Elvetham."

Schelling's Book of Elizabethan Lyrics, Introd., p. XIII.

Just why the queen was so pleased with this simple little poem is worth a thought. It lacked allegory, mythology, flattery, plays upon words, everything in which she especially delighted, and Elizabeth was not often gratified even in more graceful bit of fancy. Perhaps this is the explanation: — The "Lady of May," the closing phrase of the poem, is the name of a masque written by Sidney for the Earl of Leicester's entertainment given to the queen in 1578, when she was ostensibly deliberating on the matrimonial proposals of the Duke of Alençon. The poem then brought to her mind the congenial flattery of the masque, the persistence of the royal suitor, the apparent eagerness in which she delighted, and the praise of her decision implied in Bretons referring to the matter —

and all these were allusions of the half hidden kind that were never wasted on Elizabeth. The idea of the countryman singing under her window was not an uncommon device, but it may have been especially suggested to Breton by Gascoigne's "savage man," who appeared before the queen in the "Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth."[1]

The only suggestion of earlier pastoral work comes from his poems in the Cosens Ms.[2], though the unique copy of Breton's Bower of Delights in the library at Britwell might, if accessible, afford valuable testimony. The date of the Cosens Ms. is uncertain. An epitaph on Sidney would make it seem that the poems were collected soon after 1586; but another epitaph, on a death that

[1] Nichols's Progresses of Queen Elizabeth.
[2] In the British Museum.

occurred in 1553, would make the probable date of at least some of the poems much earlier. How the work that is known to be Breton's, even up to the last quarter of Elizabeth's reign, not only manifests no special pastoral tendencies, but is of a quality so markedly inferior to even the poorest of his pastorals that I cannot believe those in the Sloane Ms. to have greatly antedated 1591.

Breton shows his familiarity with the pastorals and love-lyrics that preceded him, even though it be often simply in avoiding their faults. That he knew the Italian pastoral in the original is probable from the diary of Reverend Richard Madox (1582)[1], which says of him, "He speaketh the Italian well", but he makes no attempt to imitate Sannazaro's grave and stately discourse.

[1] Sloane Ms. 5008, British Museum.

He has avoided the pettiness, satire and the scandal and treachery of Barnabe Googe, while adopting his simplicity and purity of thought. He follows Surrey in delicate sincerity, and in an occasional touch of satire, but not in his laboured involutions, and, unfortunately, not in his impassioned sentiment. He is incapable of the lack of taste that permits an occasional disgusting subject or simile to Wyatt as he is of the blind following of fashion that led Turbervile to tell so many revolting stories so excellently well. Unhappily, he follows Turbervile in presenting the inevitable moral well laid on, but in choice of subjects he is far in advance. Turbervile writes indiscriminately on the inconstancy of woman and the horrors of Russia; Breton in his great variety of themes has not chosen one that is incapable of

poetical treatment. The sensual element of Watson he has replaced by a most exquisite sensibility to beauty and grace, not only of form and feature, but of spirit: His nymphs and shepherdesses are beautiful as a matter of course, but with one exception,[1] there are no inventoried details of their physical attractions. It is their kindness, wit, purity, sympathy, modesty, truth, sincerity, that appeal to him, charms of the real woman, and not of the somewhat voluptuous nymph. His admiration for Spenser is manifest. He does not attain to the peerless harmony of the Spenserian verse, but he avoids what is to me the one blemish on Spenser's pastorals, the slight air of patronage toward his rustics. Spenser paints simplicity

[1] Passionate Shepherd, 3.

of life, but from the outside, and his "Cuddie" and "Diggon" sometimes talk like the "Cuddie" and "Diggon" of a poet's dream. That Lodge influenced him in his pastoral is probable from the effect apparently produced upon him by Endimion,[1] for the main thought of Endimion, love arousing from death or from sleep, is the keynote of so many of his pastorals and love-poems; e.g.,

"By thy comfort have been seen
Dead men brought to life again."[2]

"He pity cried, and pity came,
And pitied so his pain,
As dying would not let him die
But gave him life again."[3]

[1] Written probably 1581 or 1582; acted February 1591. [2] Phillis and Coridon. [3] Astrophell his Song of Phillida and Coridon. See also Phillis in Sorrow, The Nightingale and Phillis, Love Dead Love Rejected, Countess of Pembroke's Love, p. 25 11, l. 6.

His familiarity with the works of Gascoigne has been noted[1], and it has been suggested[2] that the title of his Small Handful of Fragrant Flowers was perhaps imitated from Gascoigne's Posies. By the marriage of his widowed mother with Gascoigne, Breton was brought into close connection with perhaps the strongest literary personality of the time. So a man who developed as slowly as Breton, the nine years, from the age of twenty four to thirty three, during which Gascoigne was his stepfather, were formative years. The fact that his first writings appeared a few months before Gascoigne's death, and that there was an interval of fifteen years before his next book was published suggests

[1] Grosart's Breton, Introd. p. LXVI.
[2] Schelling's Life and Writings of George Gascoigne, p. 53, note 4.

almost inevitably that his pursuit of literary fame had lost by that death its inspiration and encouragement. His poems rival Gascoigne's in sincerity, but while those of the earlier poet have an autobiographical tone, Bretan's give the impression of being the work of a close observer. He had nothing of the objective originality that led Gascoigne to attempt new styles and to test new methods; his originality was purely subjective, and consisted in adding something of his own to whatever established fashion he chose to follow. In delicacy of imagery he surpasses greatly even Gascoigne, who "drowns in dole" and "wallows in joy", whose sighs "boil" out of his heart and "scald" his breast in the process. Where Gascoigne says,

[1] Haslitt's edition of Gascoigne, I. 40.

"Amid my bale I bathe in bliss,"
Bretan writes.[1]
"They bide in bliss amid their weary bale."
In love of nature the two poets stood
together, but here Gascoigne had
the wider view and was by far
the keener observer.

With Sidney I find Bretan in
accord, not in externals of style
and expression, but differing
only in degree, in "that individual
note, that intense and passionate
cry of the poet's very heart."[2] Sidney's
humanness is one of his greatest
charms; and Bretan's most trivial
pastorals and love-poems give
us the human shining through the
delicately ideal. Instead of his
"Phillida" and "Aglaia", write the names
of real maidens, and these are poems
of unaffected love, sadness, courage,

[1] Flourish upon Fancy, 25/1, l. 13.
[2] Schelling's Book of Elizabethan Lyrics, Introd., p. XI

or despair. Watson is always insincere. Wyatt's love-poems are his idea of how a lover ought to feel toward a Dulcinea who was all that his fancy ought to paint her; but with both Sidney and Bretan there is an air of sincerity that makes the poems seem the result of real experiences. Even in style there are similarities. Sidney has a high-bred courtliness and gentle grace which Bretan lacks, but both show the same love of simple and musical words; the same smooth, easy flow of language, and deeply deepened by same apposite richness of thought; the same diffuseness of word and exactness of idea; the same transparency and simplicity by no means indicative of shallowness; and most of all, that inimitable air of almost trustfulness, differing in that Bretan had had to win his friends,

to make his life, while Sidney had always been surrounded by love and appreciation.

Breton shows in his pastoral little of the verbal doubling on one's tracks that is common in some of his other writings. There is little repetition of favorite phrases and devices. Easy spinner of verse though he is, he often shows the definiteness of his thought in that the first few lines of a pastoral are its key, or rather its text, and in that he knows when what he has to say has been said. In poems whose alternate lines are almost of the nature of a refrain (e.g., Phillis and Corydon, A Sweet Pastoral) there is nothing of the permissible monotony of a refrain, but a real, though subordinate, addition to the thought. One little "repeat song,"

"Shall we go dance the hay? The hay?"[1] deserves an especial word of praise for the meaning ring of its meter. His definiteness appears also in the clear-drawn details of his imagery. His birds are named, "the blackbird and the throsh"; his flowers are "roses with violets sweet"; but he is most definite of all, perhaps, in Phillis and Coridon: —

"On a hill there grows a flower,
Fair befall the dainty sweet;
By that flower there is a bower,
Where the heavenly muses meet.
In that bower there is a chair,
Fringed all about with gold" — which reminds one irresistibly of the Blessed Damozel.

In lone of the country Breton is

[1] Cf. Herrick's To Phillis to Love and Live with Him, line 30: — "To dance the hays with nimble feet"; also Sir John Davies's Orchestra, stanza 53: — "He seems to dance a perfect hay."

absolutely sincere. Wyatt rarely even mentions an object of nature; Surrey's simile has one conspicuous reference, a somewhat slender description of a mountain. Googe speaks of hunting, but elsewhere he makes almost no mention of either plant or animal, save the sheep, a reference which the traditions of the pastoral made almost unavoidable; Watson uses nature chiefly for purposes of simile; Breton, Gascoigne, and Surrey have her for herself. Nor is Breton satisfied, even in an eclogue, with nature as cultivated by man; his garden-plat must be nourished by a "quechy spring." His couplet,

"Who can live in heart so glad
As the merry country-lad,"[1]

is as real a nature-poem as

[1] Passionate Shepherd, 3.

Whittier's Barefoot Boy. It is true that his country is usually in all the glow of a "blessed June day," but it is no fool's paradise, it is real country, and when he chooses, he can paint it in other moods; e.g.,

"Full of danger is the rock;
Wolves and bears do keep the wood,
Forests full of furze and brakes,
Meadows subject to the floods;
Moors are full of miry lakes." [1]

His description of the country is purely objective. I hardly think that he would have understood Sidney's thrilling lines:—

"O sweet woods, the delight of solitariness!
O how much I do like your solitariness!" [2]

He has not the eye of a nineteenth

[1] Chaucer Anthology. [2] Arcadia, Book 2.

century naturalist for scientific details, and he rarely notes individual characteristics. His lambs "run at base", the quails are flying, the bee finds honey. The daisy is simply a daisy; whether it is single or double, white or "crimson-tipped", he has never noticed, but he loves it, and it is this childlike love of his that is so refreshing in this age of the laboratory and the microscope. His favorite animals are the gentle, timorous ones, and I can hardly forgive him, even though he is in company with Shakespeare, that he shows a real antipathy to the dog.

His subject is never complex; it is always a simple incident or a single mood; and in this simplicity there is something of the once-upon-a-time air of an oft-told tale. The familiar adverbial beginning is one of his favorites:

e.g.: "On a hill there grows a flower." [1]
"In the merry month of May." [2]
"Upon a dainty hill sometime." [3]

Not that Breton's pastoral has the insouciance of a fairy-tale! There is sometimes a note of unaffected sadness; there is satire, kindly but keen of sight; often in the midst of the lighter touches is there a deeper tone of some universal thought.

[1] A Pastoral of Phillis and Coridon.
[2] Phillida and Coridon.
[3] The Nightingale and Phillis.

VII. Saturn.

A literary man sensitive to the movements of his age could hardly have neglected the writing of Satire, indicating as it did the influence of the Drama in its nice distinctions of character-drawing. In Bretons pastoral, even in his religious poems, there are traces of the keenly critical spirit that makes Satire possible. But his earliest strictly satirical work, the Pasquil series, belongs to 1600. Early the next year Breton, Jonson, and Marston were attacked by "W. S." (William Sheppard? John Weever?) in the Whipping of the Satyre, the stinging allusions to Jonson and Breton being rendered even more unmistakable by marginal notes.[1]

[1] Collier's Bibliographical Account under Whipping of the Satyre.

The reply made to this was the No Whipping, to Breton's authorship of which the internal evidence is almost conclusive. Grosart notes[1] the similarity of the ending of the introductory epistle to those of The Murmurer, The Good and the Bad, and Wit's Private Wealth. There are Breton's striking expressions that appear in the Pasquil series, his "Had I wist," his "Woe begone me," his favorite contrasts, "will — wit," "King — beggar;" his appreciation of the power of money and his never failing afterthought that goodness is far more desirable. There is the inevitable play on words, but with the moral ending so eminently Bretonesque, e.g.,

"Know you a villain? Let him find his match
And show not you a match a villain's skill.

. . . . . .

[1] Grosart's Breton, Introd., p. XXXI

Let pass the villain with his villainy.
Make thou thy match with better company.

But far less easy of imitation by the satirist is Breton's readiness to acknowledge his own faults, his humanity, his kindly spirit, his alternate raillery and gravity, with the earnestness of aim underlying both; and perhaps most of all, his eager clinging to his friends and his fear to wound even an enemy, combined with his manly independence of spirit.

Satire can hardly fail to be an honest expression of the author's thought. To the student of Breton, then, the author reveals himself more freely here than in any of his other writings. Juvenal's bitter lashings were the model of

[1] Grosart's Breton, Introd., p. xxxiii; xxxi - xxxvii gives long extracts from his Whipping.

sixteenth century satire, followed closely by Hall, Marston, Donne, and a crowd of lesser writers, who echoed their vituperation though not their genius. There could be no greater contrast with the work of these men than that of Breton. He lacks Hall's obstreperous vigor, as he does his harshness, his obscurity, and his occasional foulness. Marston is fiercely acrimonious, often wilely scurrilous. Saintsbury calls him[1] "nearly the foulest, if not quite the foulest writer of any English classic." His "fury of demoniac laughter" is even more bitter than his invective. Donne's satire often fairly blazes with almost malignant rage; his sarcasm is too bitter for any touch of humor.

With none of these has Breton

[1] Elizabethan Literature, chapter IV, p. 151.

anything in common. His satire comes directly from Gascoigne, and shows the same penetrating but friendly insight, the same power to authrie briefly and tellingly the good and the bad, the same carefulness to blame wrongs rather than individuals, the same sensitive watchfulness not to wound the innocent. Breton's satire was directed chiefly against wealth versus poverty; Gascoigne takes higher ground and satirizes "such as love to see — but not to be"[1] but both write like men who knew their world. The Fool's Cap is full of sound worldly wisdom in the same key as the advice of Polonius: —

"He that doth fill his coffers full of gold,
Yet will not wear good clothes on his back
But doth a kind of clownish humor hold
To have his garment cut out like a sack,

[1] The Steele Glas, Hazlitt's Gascoigne, II. p. 186.

And thinks red herring have a dainty smack
Left him in kindness (that he may not quarrel),
Fie foolscap will be fit for his apparel."[1]

Even while he chides the thirst for gold,
he admits freely the benefits that gold
can procure.

He is in word and suggestion
absolutely free from any touch
of obscenity. His satire is marked by
its impersonality, its unselfishness;
the injustice that he castigates is not
the injustice that has touched him;
e.g., he nowhere manifests any
longing for academic distinction,
but there is acumen and sympathy
in his lines:[2] —

"And grieve to see true learning's worth decrease,
When that a dunce doth take a doctor's charge."

He is often playful, but never flippant.
His humour varies with his mood;

[1] Foolscap, p. 21/2, l. 1.
[2] The Soul's Immortal Crown, p. 8/2, l. 27.

sometimes it comes from unexpected juxtaposition, but far oftener from a picture brought before the mind by a few telling strokes; e.g.,

"He like the crane that stalks along the street,
And overlooks the moon and all the stars,
She that doth softly strive to set her feet
As though her joints had lately been at wars"[1]

Sometimes his exuberance overpowers his humour, but generally he sees the ludicrous and the serious at the same glance. Pasquil's Precession, for instance, is a litany, in which, within the narrow limits of one stanza, he prays to be delivered,

"From lazing sloth for to abuse a friend,"[2]

and also,

"From surfeiting within a cherry tree"

[1] Pasquil's Mad Cap, p. 9/1, l. 50.
[2] Pasquil's Precession, 8/1, l. 22.
[3] Ibid. l. 27.

Pasquil's Progostications is in the same line as the closing passages of Gascoigne's Steele Glas, and is as full of sound morals as Holmes's Latter Day Warnings, only where Holmes can rail and laugh, and leave the reader to find his own lesson, Breton is a little afraid of trusting his moral to stand alone. Just why Lee[1] should have said that Breton wrote like a disappointed man, I do not see. It is true that he is sometimes melancholy and that his future is not always rainbow-tinted, but he never fails that it has a foundation of good sense and reasonable hope, and that the following out of his prescriptions will have a salutary effect.

After all, the greatest charm of his satires is their kindliness, their

[1] Dictionary of National Biography, article Breton

never carrying fire where light will suffice. Marston[1] almost annihilates the poor lover who worships the picture of his mistress. Bretan[2] in mock seriousness forbids that one should kneel to a dead image while there is one alive for the purpose. Donne's Will is a biting sarcasm; Bretan's Farewell,[3] like Gascoigne's Lullaby of a Lover, has no touch of bitterness. The first

"I had no suit there, nor new suit to shew,
Yet went to court,"[4]

which in Donne is stinging sarcasm, would in Bretan, even if expressed in the same words, be so pervaded with the general tone of humanity and kindliness as to lose its sting.

1 Scourge of Villainy, l. 92.
2 Strange News out of Divers Countries, p. 71, l. 16.
3 Melancholike Humours, p. 10.
4 Donne's Satire IV.

VIII. The Lesson in His Work.

No poet ever manifested himself in his work more clearly than does Breton. The characteristic that comes most to the surface is his good-will toward all men. Even before his Somnetime on Treason he speaks of "wanting no person offending, and wishing there had never been such an offence". He is on friendly terms not only with the human race, but with the lower animals. It pleases him to see that the "flies be dancing in the sun"[1] and he likes to watch

"The little black-haired conny,
On a bank for sunny place,
With her fore-feet wash her face."[2]

His manly independence of

[1] Passionate Shepherd, 2. [2] Ibid. 3.

character, quiet and unobtrusive as it is, is absolutely unbending. Even in those of his dedications and prefaces that are written in the euphuistic vein, so subtle an incentive to flattery, he makes no attempt to curry the favor that removed so many obstacles from the path of the literary man of the sixteenth century. Even Gascoigne makes appeals for patronage, distasteful as they must have been to him; and he does it in a delightfully persistent, business-like fashion, as if he meant to end a disagreeable matter as soon as possible. Breton manifests a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind," asks that his book be read, and evinces a healthy gratitude in advance, but does not hesitate to sign himself "Your friend

as I find cause."[1] Sometimes he does not even ask for a reading, but says, "You shall read it if it shall please you, and consider of it as it shall like you."[2] His dedication to King James[3] is marked by the same quiet dignity and self-reliance, and a firm though modest conviction that, faulty as it may be, what he has written is yet worth reading. Not even to find the taste of a prince would he deserve from his course; e.g., James delighted in theological controversy, but of Bretons seventeen booklets that appeared after 1603, not one is in the least controversial, and but two can be called strictly theological

It was a time of freedom.

[1] Preface to The Soul's Immortal Crown.
[2] Pasquil's Pass and Passeth Not, epistle to the reader.
[3] Soul's Immortal Crown.

but also of unbounded servility and worship of titles. Barnabe Googe in his Epitaphe on Lord Sheffield's Death (1563), is less overpowered by the death than by the thought that "were crabbed thoughts" should have ventured to murder a man who was "lord by birth." In an age that was on its knees before a queen who could demand and assimilate grosser adulation than any other mortal, Bretan contented himself with expressing his appreciation of what good she had already done, and encouraging her to do more.

In rare contrast with his independence is his intellectual modesty. He was no ignorant man; besides those authors whose influence he shows, he makes direct reference to Petrarch, Sannazaro, Ariosto, Dante, Serafino, Machiavelli, Ovid, Cicero, Virgil, and Homer.

He spoke Italian; with Latin he was familiar enough to treat it in easy, colloquial fashion. A pedantic display of erudition would not have been a difficult matter for Bretan, but he was no pedant. In a day when "Poets desired to show their learning, their knowledge of the details of mythology, their acquaintance with the more fantastic theories of contemporary science," Bretan's mythological allusions were comparatively few, hardly too many for the taste of the present age. Of the sciences he has little to say. He gives an occasional quizzical word to alchemy; astronomy, or astrology, he mentions more frequently than the others, and

/ Auteur Lanzi's introduction to Chapman in Ward's English Poets.

usually with good-natured incredulity, the more remarkable at a time when the greatest men were firm believers in the fates as foretold by the stars. His knowledge of all kinds he wears lightly, as if he loved it rather than set a value upon it. "Facile, ready, ever fertile," as he was, he had not the officious readiness of the shallow mind. That he is easy reading, that one does not find the resistance of Donne, is not due to lack of thought, but rather to the clearness and simplicity with which his thought is expressed. His reader is called on to think with the words, not between them; and any possible impression of weakness comes rather from diffuseness of style, than from

Schelling's Elizabethan Lyrics, p. 226.

vagueness or feebleness of thought.

Bretaw was not a great poet, but he was admired by the same audience that admired great poets. Aside from his literary merits, I should ascribe this to two causes: —

1. To his avoidance of opposition by following the literary line of least resistance, e.g., in his never introducing a new literary fashion, and in never adopting one that had not become an established favorite.

2. To his ability to please an unusually varied audience, resulting from his power to combine in each kind of verse qualities that other and greater writers would have found inharmonious; e.g., his religious poetry is ardent and spiritual enough to please the most devout, and is outspoken enough to win the respect of the most belligerent controversialist: his pastoral would delight the lover of sprightly, graceful

verse, and its touch of reality and earnestness would not leave entirely unsatisfied the desires of the deepest student of human nature: his nature was keen enough to hold its own with that of Hall, Donne, and Marston, and kindly enough not to guerdon those that would more "gently scan" their fellowman.

Breton was charitable to his foes, almost pathetically devoted to his friends, and capable of a generous, romantic friendship. He disliked harshness and violence, and for the sake of peace would sacrifice anything but his own sturdy self-respect. In the expression of his religious feelings he leaned toward the sentimental, but his faith was sincere, and had grown up in a bracing atmosphere of practical commonsense. His nature was not profound, neither was it shallow; it was sunny, contented, almost

transparently artless and childlike. He was a poet, and he was more; he was a kind-hearted, pure-minded, likable man.

None can feel more keenly than I the incompleteness of this study of Nicholas Breton. He a political pamphleteer, a writer of "characters," a novelist, a humorist, a philosopher, a letter-writer, his work has not even been mentioned. All that could be attempted was to present this richly endowed nature on its poetical side, leaving to some other pen the many phases of his literary activity that are here untouched.

Eva March Tappan.

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